

# PHARMACISTS CAN DO MORE TO TRANSFORM COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

As we approach flu season, and governments and Canadians prepare for the impact that the onslaught of influenza has on our emergency rooms and health clinics across the country, it's important to look back and reflect on how much easier it is to get a flu shot today than a decade ago. Just walk into one of Canada's 10,000 pharmacies and a highly-trained pharmacist will give you your flu shot faster and easier than ever before.

Allowing our pharmacists to give the flu shot allows Canadians to access healthcare close to home, prevents illness, and frees up precious resources, such as our family doctor's offices. Small change, big reward.

When it comes to mitigating the spread of influenza, pharmacists have played a leading role in working with government to find solutions to this challenge. We know there is more that pharmacists can do.

Right now, across Canada, governments and pharmacists are working to tackle some of our most pressing health challenges from the urgency of the opioid crisis, to increasing access to home care and mental health services, to being ready and able to implement effective regulatory regimes for medicinal cannabis.

With 42,000 pharmacists practicing in virtually every community across Canada, pharmacists can and should be doing more. As the most accessible health care providers, pharmacists see patients on average 14 times per year, and each individual pharmacist manages about 1,300 patients in their community. It should therefore come as no surprise that more than half of patients seek out pharmacists first, before any other health care practitioner. In fact, according to an Abacus Data survey conducted this summer of 2,000 Canadians, 89% believe pharmacists are easily and consistently accessible when they need one. By optimizing the care that can be provided by pharmacists, we have an opportunity to deliver more and better care in a cost-effective manner to Canadians.

Over the last decade, Canada's pharmacists have risen to the challenge and have diversified the many services that they offer to their patients, from renewing prescriptions and administering vaccinations to managing medication and prescribing for minor ailments and conditions. And Canadians agree. In the Abacus Data survey 82% of Canadians said they were comfortable with the idea of pharmacists providing additional services.

Pharmacists also have a key role to play in some of the more acute healthcare challenges facing the country – including the opioid crisis. This crisis requires contributions and actions from all levels of government and virtually every part of the health-care sector. Determined to play our part, pharmacists are taking a leadership role, as medication experts, in proposing strategies to mitigate and address over-prescribing and pain management as well as supporting harm reduction strategies that will reduce drug diversion and overdose.

This is just but one example of new services that pharmacists could provide that benefit patients and save the healthcare system precious resources – human and financial. Pharmacists as a profession are qualified and trusted by Canadians, which is why we know there is valued role for pharmacists in other areas such as smoking cessation programs, advanced medication review for heart disease, vaccinations for our most vulnerable and supporting patients requiring medicinal cannabis.

As our organizations continue to work in coordination to develop strategies that allow pharmacists to provide more care options for more Canadians in more cost-effective ways, we are proud to say that pharmacists have never been more needed and more important

contributors to patient and community health than they are today.

We look forward to working closely with governments to shape our healthcare transformation to deliver accessible healthcare services to Canadians when and where they need it. By reducing the number of people needing hospitalization, visiting emergency rooms, or even needing to book appointments with a family doctor, pharmacists are not only improving patient health, but they are saving the health care system money.

Today, pharmacists are already delivering an estimated \$4.7 billion of value to the Canadian health care system by preventing adverse drug reactions, reviewing prescriptions and identifying clinical errors or interactions. With even greater scope of practice, pharmacists could deliver even greater efficiencies to Canada's health system and provide more accessible care to Canadians.

Canada's pharmacists have and will continue to be a partner in developing better healthcare solutions for communities, but in order to do this, governments need to include pharmacists as they develop policies and make decisions that impact our profession and our ability to provide healthcare services to Canadians.

Pharmacists must be at the table with governments to find solutions, rather than an afterthought, as an equal partner in planning health system optimization and improved care for all in communities from coast to coast to coast. Governments should – as they work to address the current and future challenges we face in health care – enlist the help of pharmacists, building on the success of improved access to seasonal flu shots.

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